

Title: Harmful Asian American and Middle Eastern American Stereotypes in Popular Discourse

I. Key Words: Asian American, Middle Eastern American, Post-9/11 Immigration Policies, Islamophobia, Model Minority, Bamboo Ceiling

II. Issue Summary: Middle Eastern Americans and Asian Americans suffer from ethnoracial stereotypes (e.g., Islamophobia, the model minority myth) in popular discourse and policy making, especially pertaining to civil liberties and immigration. Discussions on civil liberties and immigration should focus on unpacking the realities of minority experiences and demographics in order to create more inclusive public policies.

III. Key Points

- Middle Eastern Americans suffer from Islamophobia, prejudice or bigotry toward Muslims, in mainstream discourse and policy making
Policies motivated by Islamophobia falsely conflate Middle Eastern Americans with Muslims
- The model minority myth inaccurately generalize all Asian Americans as outperforming the average population in terms of education and socioeconomic status
- The model minority myth is hurtful for many Asian subpopulations, which face different levels of economic or educational opportunities
- An understanding of these harmful stereotypes will lead to more effective policies that affect minority and immigrant populations
- Middle Eastern Americans and Asian Americans have the potential to find coalition-building within their own and with other panethnic groups

IV. Issue Brief

While contemporary discussions on immigration in American politics focus on Hispanic American immigration, it is important to examine the nuanced experiences of other immigrant groups in the United States. By expanding a discussion on immigration to various immigrant communities, one can find distinct experiences and thus the potential for more powerful and effective modes of coalition.

In the United States, Middle Eastern Americans face Islamophobia, which falsely conflates ethnoracial identity with religious identity and thus limits the mobility and civil liberties of that ethnoracial group. Middle Eastern Americans refer to immigrants and people of descent from the geographic region of the Middle East, including Egypt and West Asia. In 2013, there were 1.02

million immigrants in the United States from the Middle East and North Africa, amounting to 2.5 percent of U.S. immigrants. This population is diverse, encompassing immigrants from Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen and ethnic groups such as Arabs, Kurds, and Turks (Zong and Batalova). Islam, as a religion, is distinct from Middle Eastern as an ethnoracial grouping. In fact, most Arab Americans are not Muslim (class lecture). According to the Pew Research Center, Muslims comprise less than 1 percent of the U.S. adult population.

Middle Eastern Americans have suffered from Islamophobia in immigration policy and mainstream discourse. According to *Quartz* journalist Jake Flanagan, the post-9/11 creations of the Department of Homeland Security and Transportation Security Administration have contributed to “rampant discrimination and racial profiling” based on Middle Eastern descent. Anti-Muslim sentiments have also entered partisan political rhetoric, with Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump calling for a ban on all Muslims in December 2015. That same month, the passage of a visa waiver bill by the U.S. House of Representatives illustrates the confluence of anti-Muslim sentiments with prejudice against Middle Eastern people. The bill seeks to exclude dual-nationals from Iran, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and recent travelers to those countries from visa waiver travel to 38 countries. A letter to *the New York Times* by 4,600 educators said that the measure would “relegate American Arabs and Muslims to second-class citizen status.”

Asian Americans, on the other hand, experience effects of the model minority myth, which generalizes that all Asian Americans are socioeconomically successful, thereby silencing Asian American communities living at the margins of popular discourse. Asian American refers to immigrants and people of descent from the geographic regions of East Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. Like Middle Eastern Americans, Asian Americans are extremely diverse, representing various cultures, languages, religious beliefs, and ethnic subgroupings. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, there were 17 million Asian Americans, comprising 5.6 percent of the U.S. population. Asian Americans are the highest-income, best-educated, and fastest-growing ethnoracial

group in the United States, leading to the model minority moniker (Pew Research Center). A model minority is a minority group that outperforms population average in terms of markers such as income, education, and family stability. Indeed, Asian Americans include more people with college degrees (49%) and have a higher median annual household income (\$66,000) than all U.S. adults on average (28% and \$49,800).

Nonetheless, these general statistical conclusions about Asian Americans contribute to a model minority myth that undermines socioeconomic disparities across this panethnic identity. Education completion varies widely between Asian Americans arriving on employment-based visas and those who arrive as refugees (Malik). For example, nearly 40 percent of Hmong-Americans and 38 percent of Laotian-Americans do not finish high school (Wang). “We’re not monolithically doing well,” argues Christopher Kang, director of the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, “Some Asian groups have a higher education attainment and median household income, while others are struggling. The latter are largely overlooked in conversations about Asian Americans” (See Graphics). On the other socioeconomic extreme, Asian Americans comprise only 14 percent of U.S. corporate executives and 2.4 percent of the U.S. Congress, creating a phenomenon known as the “bamboo ceiling” (*The Economist*). Asian Americans have the unique challenge of facing an identity that is socioeconomically privileged over other minority groups while still facing ethnoracial prejudices in upward mobility.

Policies motivated by false stereotypes threaten the civil liberties and opportunities of all minority Americans. Although immigrant experiences are diverse, there is opportunity for coalition and support across ethnoracial groups. For example, in December 2015, Advancing Justice-LA, an Asian American advocacy group, organized a vigil to demonstrate solidarity with the Muslim in response to increasing Islamophobic attacks globally. In the future, Asian Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, and other minority groups can join together to publicize bigoted actions, policies, and conclusions based on and reinforcing harmful ethnoracial stereotypes.

V. Graphics



On December 11, 2015, Authorities charged Carl James Dial with a hate crime, arson, and burglary in connection with a fire that began before prayer service in the Islamic Society of Coachella Valley mosque. This illustrates a violent act motivated by hate towards the Muslim community. Such actions and attitudes then limit the mobility of all Middle Eastern Americans.

<http://nyti.ms/1Tff1Dn>

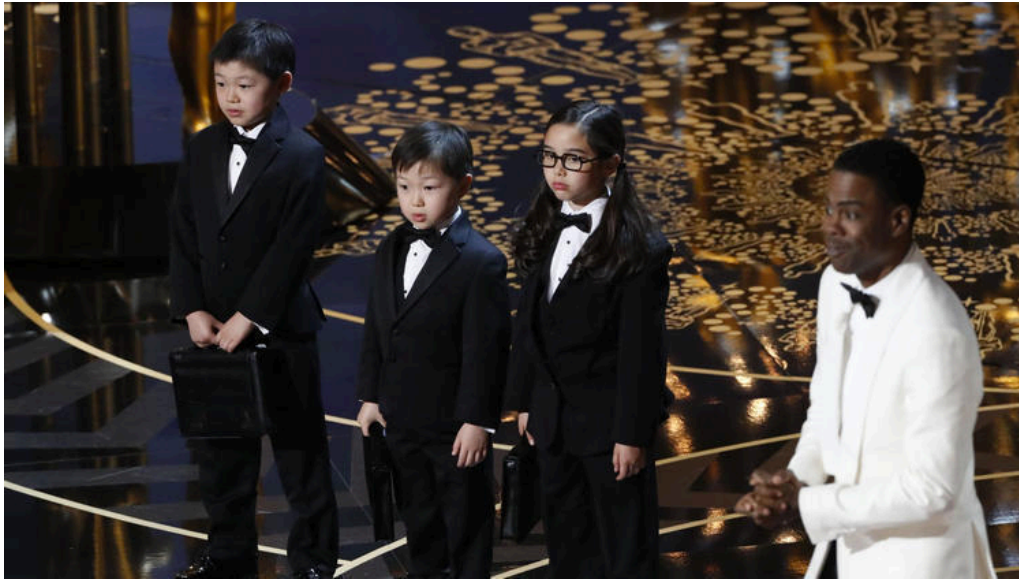
Asian Americans in Higher Education

Percent of Asian Americans (25+) with a bachelor's degree or higher



While Asian Americans are more likely to have higher education than the U.S. population on average, access to education varies widely between different Asian ethnic groups. Here, it is clear that there is disparity in the percentage of different ethnic groups with a bachelor's degree.

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/asianamericans-graphics>



Chris Rock performs a joke at the Academy Awards on February 28, 2016, that perpetuate the stereotypes that Asian Americans are good at jobs like accounting and child workers. This stereotype characterizes Asian Americans as high performing at certain jobs only, while marginalizing the actual lived experiences of Asian Americans without access to such socioeconomic opportunities.

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-asians-protesting-oscar-jokes-20160315-story.html>



Advancing Justice-LA, an Asian American advocacy group, organized a vigil, "VigilantLove," on December 10 to demonstrate solidarity by Asian American communities for the broader Muslim community, including Syrian refugees and those threatened by Islamophobic attacks.

<http://advancingjustice-la.org/blog/asian-americans-we-must-stand-strong-against-islamophobia#.VthfsZMrKqC>

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